

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended) A method for partitioning a three-dimensional graphical environment for displaying representative images of objects in a database comprising:

representing the database of objects with a hierarchical tree derived from object metadata;

pre-assigning a predetermined parent node to an area corresponding to the undivided graphical environment;

starting with the predetermined node, for each area corresponding to each parent node in the tree having at least two associated child nodes:

~~recursively partitioning the area into a plurality of areas corresponding to each associated child node such that the areas are proportional to the weight of each child node.~~

dividing the associated children nodes of the parent node into groups of one or more nodes each dependent on a combined normalized node weight of each group of nodes;

partitioning the area associated with the parent node and assigning areas created by partitions to each group dependent on each group's combined weight;

repeating dividing and partitioning for all groups associated with the parent node until each group includes a single node.

Claim 2 (currently amended) A method as described in Claim 1 wherein ~~recursively partitioning further comprising:~~

~~a) dividing the associated children nodes of the parent node into~~ there are N groups of one or more nodes each dependent on a the combined normalized node weight, W_N , of each group of nodes and such that W_N of each group approaches a ratio of $R=1/N$;

~~b) partitioning the area associated with the parent node and assigning areas created by partitions to each group dependent on each group's combined weight;~~

~~e) repeating a) b) for all groups associated with the parent node until each group includes a single node.~~

Claim 3 (original) The method as described in Claim 2 wherein $N=2$.

Claim 4 (original) The method as described in Claim 2 wherein recursively partitioning further comprising selecting one of a horizontal partition and a vertical partition.

Claim 5 (original) The method as described in Claim 4 wherein recursively partitioning further comprising selecting one of the horizontal partition and vertical partition dependent on the aspect ratio of areas created by each of the horizontal partition and the vertical partition.

Claim 6 (original) The method as described in Claim 5 wherein recursively partitioning further comprising selecting one of the horizontal partition and vertical partition having the least aspect ratio.

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CMH Claim 7 (currently amended) An apparatus for partitioning a three-dimensional graphical environment for displaying representative images of objects in a database comprising:

tree deriver for deriving a hierarchical tree representative of a database of objects from object metadata;

grouper for dividing a parent's associated child nodes into N groups of one or more nodes each dependent on a combined normalized node weight;

determiner for determining ~~an associated weight~~ a combined normalized node weight for each group of node of the tree; and

area partitioner for partitioning an area associated with the graphical environment into a plurality of areas such that the areas are proportional to ~~node~~ the weights of the group.

Claim 8 (cancelled)

Claim 9 (original) The apparatus as described in Claim 7 wherein the area partitioner further comprising a vertical partitioner for vertically partitioning and a horizontal partitioner for horizontally partitioning.

Claim 10 (cancelled)

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Claim 11 (original) The apparatus as described in Claim 9 wherein the area partitioner further comprising an aspect ratio determiner for determining the aspect ratio of areas created by each of the vertical partitioner and the horizontal partitioner and selecting one of a vertical partition and a horizontal partition dependent on the aspect ratio.

Claim 12 (cancelled)